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ABSTRACT

Parents are the primary agents in the development and definition of the self. Previous research has reported nurturance as the most notable parental factor in global self-esteem. This study examined the relationship of parental nurturance to self-esteem for the first time with subjects older than high school students. College students (N=333) completed the 76-item Parental Nurturance Scale and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. The results revealed that 43 percent of the variance in self-esteem for women and 30 percent of the variance for men were associated with parental nurturance. Father's nurturance was as important as mother's nurturance to the self-esteem of both men and women. The demonstrated relationship between parental nurturance and self-esteem is noteworthy since it has been shown to persist after children have moved away from home and gone to college. Individual item response/self-esteem correlation coefficients were significant. Results confirmed the unitary nature of the Parental Nurturance Scale. (Tables of the correlations for item responses and self-esteem on the Mother's and Father's Nurturance Scales are included.) (ABL)

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"Nothing I Ever Do Seems To Please My Parents": Female and Male Self-Esteem As a Function of Mother's and Father's Nurturance

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ABSTRACT: *Self-esteem as a function of parental nurturance was investigated. The results revealed that: a) 43% of the variance in self-esteem in women is associated with parental nurturance (30% in males) and b) father's nurturance is as important to self-esteem (in both females and males) as is mother's nurturance. The realtionship between individual dimensions of parental nurturance and self-esteem were investigated.*

Since the introduction of the concept of the "social self" (James, 1890) into the psychological literature, few social psychologists have denied the critical importance of social interactions in the development and definition of the self. Furthered by Cooley's (1902) "looking glass self" and Mead's (1934) more formalized discussion of symbolic interactionism, we have come to view social interactions as prominent in the process of apprehending and assuming specific characteristics about one's self. As suggested by several researchers (e.g., Bachman, 1982; Coopersmith, 1967; Helper, 1958), parents are primary agents in the development of these "reflected appraisals" (Rosenberg, 1979).

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In the investigation of one dominant evaluative dimension of the self, global self-esteem, the most noteable parental factor has been that of nurturance. Several researchers (Bachman, 1982; Coopersmith, 1967; Gecas, 1971; Rosenberg, 1965; Sears, 1970) have reported that parents' acceptance, affection, support, and attention are positively related to the self-esteem of their children. Among these studies, none have investigated the relationship of parental nurturance to self-esteem with participants older than high school students; furthermore, for those studies in which nurturance was measured by means of structured questionnaire responses of the adolescent participants (Bachman, 1982; Gecas, 1971; Rosenberg, 1965), the number of items employed to measure nurturance ranged from 13 (Bachman, 1982) to four (Gecas, 1971). In the present study, college students' responses to a 24-item parental nurturance scale were used to determine the relationship between nurturance and self-esteem. It is anticipated that the positive relationship between parental nurturance and self-esteem found among college students is consistent with that found by previous researchers with younger age groups.

Method

Subjects

The participants were 399 college students who agreed to participate in the study as part of an introductory psychology course requirement. The responses of 53 students were not included in the present analyses either because one of their parents had died or because their paretns were divorced or separated. The responses of an additional 13 subjects were eliminated from the analyses because their response forms were inadequately completed. The remaining 168 females and 165 males completed several questionnaires.

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Materials and Procedure

The 333 college students were asked to complete three questionnaires and one demographic information sheet. The order in which these forms were presented to the participants was randomized. Each of the research participants was told that we were investigating family factors that are believed to influence self-esteem. They were instructed a) that there were no right or wrong answers and therefore they should respond to each item as honestly as possible, b) not to spend too much time on any one item since we were interested in their first reaction to each statement, and c) to be certain that they responded to each item in the questionnaires.

Parental nurturance. Concepts and items related to parental nurturance were derived from several sources (Bronfenbrenner, 1961; Gecas, 1969; Schaefer & Bell, 1958; Straus & Brown, 1978) and were used to construct 118 questionnaire items. These 118 items were stated from the point of view of an individual evaluating the parental nurturance he/she received. Consistent with the symbolic interactionist perspective, it was reasoned that the actual parental behavior to which an individual has been exposed will largely effect that individual to the extent and in the way that he/she perceives that behavior. Therefore, we were interested in appraisals of parental nurturance as perceived by the college-aged participants.

The 118 items were evaluated for duplications and 42 were judged to be restatements of other items. The wording of the remaining 76 items was then balanced to control for a response bias. These 76 items were then presented to 177 undergraduates, who were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

Item-score/total-score correlations were computed for each of these 76 items (Crano & Brewer, 1973), and those 24 statements which yielded an item-score/total-score correlation greater than .70 were retained for the final questionnaire. The wording of three of these 24 items was reversed so that the final version of the Parental Nurturance Scale consisted of 12 positively-stated items and 12 negatively-stated items. Two forms of this questionnaire were constructed, one to measure the degree of mother's nurturance and one to measure the degree of father's nurturance. Test-retest reliabilities based upon the responses of 85 college students over a two-week interval were r = .92 for mother's nurturance and r = .94 for father's nurturance. Cronbach's (1951) coefficient alpha values were .95 for mother's nurturance and .93 for father's nurturance (N = 156 college students).

Self-esteem. Each of the participants completed the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965). The Total Positive self-esteem score was derived for each subject. As operationalized by Fitts (1965), "persons with high scores tend to like themselves, feel that they are persons of value and worth, have confidence in themselves, and act accordingly. People with low scores are doubtful about their own worth; see themselves as undesirable; ...and have little faith or confidence in themselves" (p. 2). Based upon a standardization sample of 626 people, Fitts (1965) reported a test-retest reliability for the Total Positive self-esteem score of r = .92.

Demographic information. The participants also provided information concerning a) their age, b) their gender, c) whether one of their parents had died, and d) whether their parents were divorced or separated.

Results

As hypothesized, the parental nurturance variable was positively related to the self-esteem of the participants: $r = .512$ for mother's nurturance ($p < .00005$) and $r = .526$ for father's nurturance ($p < .00005$). Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that father's nurturance alone was associated with over 27% (R^2 adjusted for $df = .274$) of the variance in participants' self-esteem, and that the addition of the mother's nurturance variable significantly augmented R^2 [F (1,330) = 52.11, $p < .00001$]. Together father's nurturance and mother's nurturance accounted for 37% of the variance in participants' self-esteem.

In an effort to investigate the differential effects of nurturance upon the self-esteem of the young women and young men, further analyses were completed on the female and male data separately. Similar to the results obtained with the total data, the young women's self-esteem was found to correlate with mother's nurturance ($r = .564$, $p < .00005$) and father's nurturance ($r = .530$, $p < .00005$). Regression analyses yielded: a) an adjusted R^2 value of .313 for mother's nurturance alone, b) a significant increase in this R^2 value through the addition of the father's nurturance variable to the regression equations [F (1,165) = 33.87, $p < .0001$], and c) a combined R^2 of .430 when self-esteem was regressed on both mother's nurturance and father's nurturance.

Males' self-esteem was similarly found to correlate with mother's nurturance ($r = .449$, $p < .00005$) and father's nurturance ($r = .509$, $p < .00005$). Regression analyses revealed that father's nurturance accounted for nearly 26% of the variance in self-esteem, and that the addition of mother's nurturance significantly effected R^2 [F (1,162) = 10.91, $p < .001$]. Together father's

nurturance and mother's nurturance were associated with 30% of the variance in the male participants' self-esteem.

For the sake of individual item comparisons, we have computed the correlations between participants' responses to each of the 24 items on the Parental Nurturance Scale and their self-esteem. Table 1 contains these data for the Mother's Nurturance Scale; the correlations are presented for the combined data, for the famale data alone, and for the male data alone. All of these correlation coefficients were found to be significant; and although the correlations between the individual item responses and self-esteem were greater for the females than for the males for 22 of the 24 items, none of these differences were found to be significant. (Note: Because of the large number of tests completed here of the difference between the correlation coefficients, we employed a more stringent .01 α-level).

The correlations between the individual item responses and self-esteem for the Father's Nurturance Scale are presented in Table 2. Again all of these correlations were significant; and again the correlations between the individual item responses and self-esteem were stronger on more of the items for the females than for the males (but now on only 13 of the 24 items); but again, none of these differences were significant (using an α-level of .01).

Discussion

It was not too surprising to find that parental nurturance and self-esteem were correlated. Although other researchers (e.g., Bachman, 1982; Coopersmith, 1967; Gecas, 1971; Rosenberg, 1965; Sears, 1970) had not employed college-aged participants, they had obtained similar results. However, the following two points about the present results were surprising. First, the strength of the

Table 1

Combined, Female, and Male Correlations for Individual Item Responses and Self-Esteem on the Mother's Nurturance Scale (N = 333: 168 Females, 165 Males)

	Combined	Females	Males
1. My mother seldom says nice things about me.	-.344**	-.399**	-.292*
2. I am an important person in my mother's eyes.	.337**	.405**	.266*
3. My mother often acts as if she doesn't care about me.	-.313**	-.316**	-.323*
4. My mother enjoys spending time with me.	.368**	.414**	.314*
5. My mother expresses her warmth and affection for me.	.373**	.433**	.307*
6. My mother is easy for me to talk to.	.376**	.448**	.308*
7. I am tense and uneasy when my mother and I are together.	-.358**	-.397**	-.311*
8. I feel that my mother finds fault with me more often than I deserve.	-.343**	-.383**	-.313*
9. My mother takes an active interest in my affairs.	.286**	.327**	.232*
10. I feel very close to my mother.	.379**	.459**	.289*
11. My mother does not understand me.	-.392**	-.452**	-.330*
12. My mother believes in me.	.342**	.356**	.323*
13. I don't feel that me mother enjoys being with me.	-.365**	-.406**	-.314*
14. My mother doesn't really know what kind of person I am.	-.450**	-.471**	-.420*
15. My mother is a warm and caring individual.	.357**	.424**	.280*
16. My mother does not feel that I am important and interesting.	-.373**	-.416**	-.329*
17. My mother is very interested in those things that concern me.	.372**	.462**	.263*
18. My mother is often critical of me and nothing I do ever seems to please her.	-.406**	-.424**	-.415*
19. My mother seldom shows me any affection.	-.324**	-.371**	-.264*
20. My mother consoles me and helps me when I am unhappy or in trouble.	.326**	.414**	.226*
21. My mother is generally cold and removed when I am with her.	-.356**	-.432**	-.260*
22. I receive a lot of affirmation from my mother.	.352**	.381**	.319*
23. My mother is very understanding and sympathetic.	.404**	.455**	.343*
24. My mother does not really care much what happens to me.	-.358**	-.332**	-.377*

*$p < .005$ **$p < .0005$

Table 2

Combined, Female, and Male Correlations for Individual Item Responses and Self-Esteem on the Father's Nurturance Scale (N = 333: 168 Females, 165 Males)

	Combined	Females	Males
1. My father seldom says nice things about me.	-.343**	-.355**	-.321**
2. I am an important person in my father's eyes.	.429**	.413**	.433**
3. My father often acts as if he doesn't care about me.	-.379**	-.373**	-.377**
4. My father enjoys spending time with me.	.434**	.424**	.444**
5. My father expresses his warmth and affection for me.	.347**	.442**	.232*
6. My father is easy for me to talk to.	.438**	.498**	.366**
7. I am tense and uneasy when my father and I are together.	-.388**	-.350**	-.425**
8. I feel that my father finds fault with me more often than I deserve.	-.417**	-.370**	-.463**
9. My father takes an active interest in my affairs.	.351**	.421**	.262*
10. I feel very close to my father.	.444**	.485**	.398**
11. My father does not understand me.	-.440**	-.445**	-.428**
12. My father believes in me.	.377**	.290*	.454**
13. I don't feel that my father enjoys being with me.	-.435**	-.409**	-.448**
14. My father doesn't really know what kind of person I am.	-.427**	-.453**	-.394**
15. My father is a warm and caring individual.	.229*	.278*	.254*
16. My father does not feel that I am important and interesting.	-.393**	-.380**	-.391**
17. My father is very interested in those things that concern me.	.364**	.422**	.285*
18. My father is often critical of me and nothing I do ever seems to please him.	-.406**	-.376**	-.435**
19. My father seldom shows me any affection.	-.371**	-.447**	-.275*
20. My father consoles me and helps me when I am unhappy or in trouble.	.348**	.435**	.236*
21. My father is generally cold and removed when I am with him.	-.404**	-.388**	-.406**
22. I receive a lot of affirmation from my father.	.375**	.421**	.306**
23. My father is very understanding and sympathetic.	.343**	.356**	.315**
24. My father does not really care much what happens to me.	-.345**	-.302**	-.375**

*$p < .005$ **$p < .0005$

relationship between parental nurturance and self-esteem is noteworthy. For all the participants, 37% of the variance in self-esteem was associated with parental nurturance; and for the female participants, this R^2 value was 43%! Secondly, the participants in the present study were young adults (their average age was approximately 20 years old) and over 2/3 of them no longer resided with their parents; and yet the relationship between parental nurturance and self-esteem has persisted.

Also noteworthy in the results is the fact that the relationship between father's nurturance and self-esteem was as strong as the relationship between mother's nurturance and self-esteem. Father's nurturance thus appears to be as important to the development of self-esteem as is mother's nurturance, thus supporting Caplan's (1986) recent contention that "we need to acknowledge the enormous personal and social importance and worth of parenting as a role for both women and men" (p. 71).

It is also important to notice that 43% of the variance in female participants' self-esteem was associated with the parental nurturance variables, whereas only 30% of the variance in males' self-esteem was associated with these variables. These results suggest that the development of self-esteem in females may be more dependent upon parental acceptance and approval than is the development of self-esteem in males. Such a suggestion is consistent with Chodorow's (1978) contention that a female's sense of well-being and self-worth is much more dependent upon her relationships with others than is a man's. Similarly, Holahan and Moos (1986) have reported a greater relationship between inadequate family support and maladjustment in females then in males.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the individual-item-response/self-esteem

correlation coefficients were all significant, regardless of whether the participants were female or male and regardless of whether they were responding to mother's nurturance or father's nurturance. Such results further confirm the unitary nature of the Parental Nurturance Scales.

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